

Changes at the Marketplace

Octavia's closes, Westwinds seeks new ownership

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One store has left the Marketplace at Hall's Corner, and another is looking for new ownership, as local Duxbury merchants work to keep customers in a tough economy.

Octavia's, which sold gift items, has shuttered its doors and cleaned out its store.

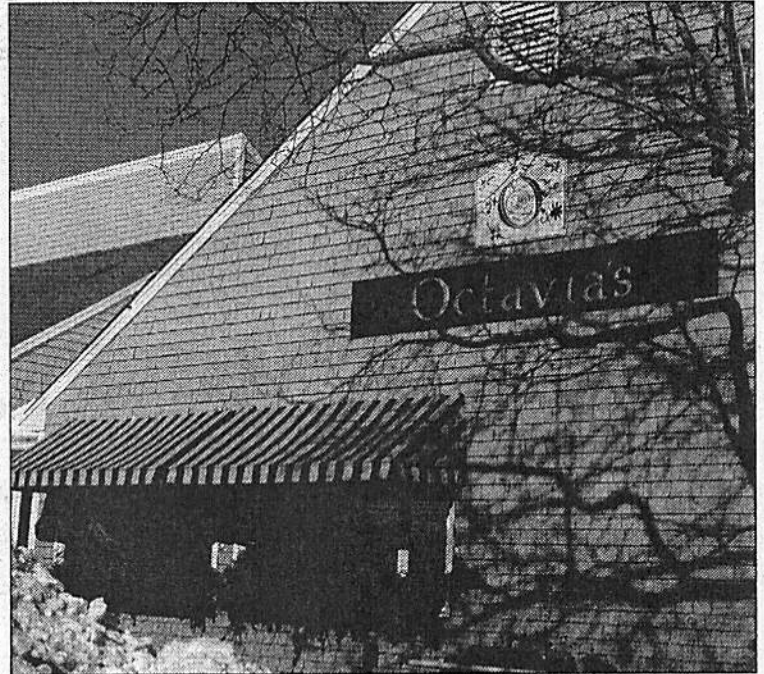
"That was just a hard loss," said Derek Cavanaugh of Hart Street Associates, the marketplace's landlord. "I loved the two of them [the women who ran Octavia's.] They just got hit by what is very common throughout the country right now ... economic pressures and unemployment."

Cavanaugh said that stores that sell housewares have taken longer to bounce back after the recession than other kinds of businesses.

Only a few storefronts away, Westwinds Bookshop is looking for new ownership, a move not so much motivated by economic factors but by other obligations.

Christopher Haraden, who owned the bookstore with his wife Marilyn, said that the couple has been thinking about selling the store for a while. Christopher Haraden recently changed jobs and doesn't have the time he used to have to back up his wife, who is the bookshop's main manager.

"I don't have the time that I used to have to be the back-stop for Marilyn," he said. "We have decided that we can't continue ourselves ... We just don't have the time that it's going to take to devote to the business."



Octavia's has left the Hall's Corner marketplace. The marketplace's landlord says that some other types of businesses have rebounded better than housewares in this economy.

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The Haradens bought the store in April of 2005.

"It's been great," Haraden said. "The people of Duxbury were very welcoming to us and were supportive."

He said that the community's connections remain strong. The shop partners with the Duxbury Free Library to bring in authors, and a recent event drew about 100 people.

"That's always been the strength of the bookshop," Haraden said. "There's still a lot of support ... We're hoping someone will see the value that we saw."

He said he and his wife would prefer to handoff the business to someone else so that Westwinds keeps going, but if there are no takers they may have to simply shut down.

"It's a real possibility," he said.

Octavia's and Westwinds are dealing with the same issues facing many local businesses in Duxbury — pressure from larger chains in places like Hingham and Plymouth, and customers with less and less spending money.

In addition, Cavanaugh said that sometimes residents will give lip service to supporting local businesses without actually walking in the door and spending. Hart Street owns a similar complex in Beverly, and when a store there was clearing inventory, a woman walked in the door and said, "You can't close, you're my favorite store!" Yet the business owner hadn't seen the woman in five years.

"It's interesting what has worked," Cavanaugh said. He pointed to a business like Depot Street Market. The owner of that business opened with an entirely different business plan, but shifted focus quickly once she saw it wasn't working. It's since become a successful take-and-bake outfit.

On the other hand are businesses like the Studio, which hasn't changed much in the

years it's been open — but still, owners John and Marcy Stanton have had to adapt.

"People have had to adapt and be flexible," Cavanaugh said. "It's just a tough time for small retail."

Cavanaugh said the Octavia's space is his only retail vacant right now (there are some vacant second-floor offices, but that's not unusual.) He does have some interest in renting the space right now, and would like to keep it retail rather than office space. Octavia's used to be two separate storefronts, and Cavanaugh said he would be open to looking at two businesses instead of one. He hopes to have a new tenant within a couple of months.

"You start eating away at the core retail and you're going to damage your remaining retail," he said. "You've got to have a number of retail in a spot to make it a destination."